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No Friends but the Mountains: How Kurdish Media Create Narratives of Ontological Security for the Kurds During Times of Instability

Bayfield, Luuk

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Bachelor Thesis – Security Studies:

No Friends but the Mountains: How Kurdish Media Create Narratives of Ontological

Security for the Kurds During Times of Instability

Luuk Bayfield

S3532216

Faculty of Global Governance and Affairs, Universiteit Leiden

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Dr Ramesh Ganohariti

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Abstract

This thesis asks: *how do Kurdish media create narratives of ontological security for the Kurds during times of instability?* After conducting a narrative analysis of 57 articles retrieved from two major Kurdish news outlets which cover events in Syria, the analysis resulted in two core findings: firstly, Kurdish media often portray Turkish military actions as part of a long-standing pattern of existential threat. Through emotionally charged language and structured narratives, Turkey is frequently linked to terrorism and accused of fascist or even genocidal intent. This framing fosters internal solidarity by clearly identifying an external enemy and casting Kurdish fighters as noble defenders. Secondly, Kurdish identity is shaped through narratives of trauma, resilience, and democratic values. Heroism, martyrdom, and betrayal are used to turn suffering into a shared source of strength and legitimacy. Rather than signalling defeat, trauma becomes a foundation for unity, rooting the Kurdish identity in a continuous narrative of resistance, affirming resilience and endurance. Additionally, values such as democracy, gender equality and inclusivity are emphasised and act as a stabilising force, anchoring the Kurdish struggle in legitimacy and righteousness. This research has found that non-state actors, such as the Kurds, use media not only to react to instability but to construct narratives that manage fear, assert political legitimacy, and reinforce collective identity – all contributing to ontological security. It demonstrates that ontological security is not just confined to sovereign states, but can also be actively produced through narrative techniques, collective memory, and symbolic representation.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AANES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
ANHA	Hawar News Agency
ANF	ANF News
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
YPG	People's Defense Units/People's Protection Units
YPJ	Women's Protection Units/Women's Defense Units

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Kurdish people – 36 million in total – spread across Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran, have long navigated a complex and oftentimes precarious relationship with regional and global powers (Küçükkeleş & Mankoff, 2014; Totten, 2015). Despite being the largest stateless population in the world, they are a minority in every country they reside in (Totten, 2015). In recent decades, US foreign policy has played a crucial role in shaping the political and security landscape of the Middle East, and more specifically the landscape of the Kurds in Syria (Hughes, 2014; Stein, 2022). The US' fluctuating commitment to Kurdish actors, ranging from military support in the fight against ISIS, to abrupt withdrawals when Turkey conducts operations in Syria, has left Kurdish political entities in a state of strategic uncertainty (Stein, 2022).

Similar research has been conducted in the past, as Aghapouri (2023) argues that there is an overlap of the emergence of print and broadcasting media and the beginning of Kurdish nationalist movements, as it enabled the Kurds to differentiate themselves from 'the other'. Therefore, Sheyholislami (2010) posits that it is difficult to understand national identities without examining how national identities serve as catalysts for their reconstruction (p. 290).

Tracing back to its origins, ontological security was first introduced by psychologist R.D. Laing (1960), before being adopted into the field of International Relations, which refers to the need for a stable sense of self and identity, both individually and collectively (Mitzen, 2006). While traditional security studies focus on physical threats, ontological security emphasises the importance of predictable narratives and self-perceptions in maintaining a coherent identity. The media, as a tool of discourse, is not solely a form of communication, as it plays an essential role in constructing a coherent identity (Sheyholislami, 2011). Sheyholislami (2011) highlights how the media functions as a cultural and political battleground asserting Kurdish identity in the absence of statehood. Considering

the existential threats and political uncertainties Kurdish groups face, the role of the media in sustaining a collective identity is particularly significant. Consequently this thesis asks: *how do Kurdish media create narratives of ontological security for the Kurds during times of instability?*

This research is situated within the broader academic discourse on media, identity construction, and security. Existing studies on Kurdish media have primarily examined its role in nation-building, resistance, and political mobilisation (Aghapouri, 2023; Aydin, 2020; Sheyholislami, 2011; Smets, 2016; Smets & Şengül, 2016). However, there has been limited scholarly attention paid to the relationship between media, not to mention Kurdish media, and ontological security – how they construct narratives that provide the psychological stability for Kurdish communities in the face of uncertainty. Additionally, the literature that does explore ontological security, does so with regards to state actors (Mitzen, 2006; Subotic, 2016; Zarakol, 2017), leaving a gap: as the question of how media organisations can create narratives of ontological security, in the absence of a state actor, remains underdeveloped.

This thesis addresses the aforementioned research gap by applying the framework of ontological security to the analysis of Kurdish media narratives in news articles by Hawar News Agency (ANHA) and ANF News in Syria. It will explore how narratives of ontological security in Kurdish media can structure a self-identity, establish collective interests, and portray external actors, most notably the US and Turkey, as either stabilising or destabilising. By doing so, this thesis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of media in shaping a collective self-identity amidst political shifts. Furthermore, it extends the application of the ontological security framework beyond the typical state actors, demonstrating its relevance to stateless nations and marginalised groups.

Based on the existing literature, the author hypothesised that Kurdish media would be very grateful for the US assistance in the fight against ISIS, and would also respond to the

shifts in foreign policy, especially the withdrawal of military support, with emotional and vengeful narratives. This assumption was based on the work done by Ameyaw-Brobbeey (2022), who found that when the US withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021, and the Taliban took over the country, it led to significant ontological insecurity for the Afghan population. While the context is vastly different in Syria, and there is no force like the Taliban consolidating power in North-East Syria, it was expected that the withdrawal of the US which was a stabilising actor in both Syria and Afghanistan –would not be downplayed. On the contrary, it was expected that such coverage would express both anxiety over abandonment and strong expressions of gratitude toward the US for its prior support.

Contrary to the hypothesis, this thesis argues that Kurdish media create narratives of ontological security by reinforcing a coherent identity in times of political uncertainty. With emotionally charged language and framing, these narratives portray the Kurds as resilient, legitimate, and enduring collective trauma, while clearly identifying Turkey as an existential threat. Narratives of shared suffering and universal values of equality and democracy unite the audience, sustain a political purpose, and compensate for the absence of a sovereign Kurdish state.

This thesis firstly conducts a literature review, investigating the existing work done on ontological security, narratives, Kurdish identity and media, and the interplay between them. Subsequently, the conceptual framework will be explored, delving into how data was collected and consequently analysed, after which the analysis is presented along with the key findings. Ultimately, all will be summarised and concluded, alongside a reflection upon the strengths and weaknesses of the research, before proposing avenues for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The origins of Ontological Security

First coined by psychologist R.D. Laing in 1960, ontological security refers to the alienation a person can feel from themselves and society. In particular, Laing uses this term for schizophrenic individuals, as he explains that the cause for schizophrenia lies in the inability to deal with one's surroundings – when one is ontologically insecure (Krickel-Choi, 2022; Laing, 1960). Contrarily, someone is ontologically secure if they do have the ability to deal with their surroundings, if their being is differentiated, so clearly that their identity and autonomy are never in question (Laing, 1990, p. 41). Laing contends that we need to understand individuals as relating to other individuals, and that they are involved in their own subjective and personally experienced world (Krickel-Choi, 2022, p. 6; Laing, 1990, pp. 19-20). In essence, ontological security can be described as the security of existence (Krickel-Choi, 2022, p. 7; Laing, 1960).

Following Laing, the theory was expanded by the sociologist Anthony Giddens, stating that if an individual's life is ontologically secure, it can only be so if there are certain components taken for granted, which is described as the “natural attitude” (Croft & Vaughan-Williams, 2017; Giddens, 1991, p. 36). Following Giddens, Mitzen (2006) adapts it into what she calls an “actor's basic trust system” (p. 346). While seeking ontological security, actors such as states and organisations build up a trust system, as they develop a metaphorical ‘cocoon’, in order to minimise uncertainty (Giddens, 1991, p. 40; Mitzen, 2006).

Over time, the concept has been extrapolated to the field of International Relations, referring to the ontological security of states. Mitzen (2006) argues that in order for the identities of individuals to be secure, society as a whole must be cognitively stable, which

will allow for a stable collective identity. Likewise, Gellwitzki and Houde (2022) posit that states attempt to achieve a security-of-being by establishing a stable self-identity.

Mitzen (2006) argues that a crucial part of ontological security is when an actor faces deep uncertainty, they perceive it as a threat to their own identity. Therefore, with ontological insecurity, Mitzen (2006) is referring to the “deep, incapacitating state of not knowing which dangers to confront and which to ignore, i.e. how to get by in the world” (p. 345). This effectively means that the actor cannot ascertain a sense of agency. Conversely, regarding ontological security, an actor does have the confidence and security to determine their actions (Gellwitzki & Houde, 2022; Gustafsson & Krickel-Choi, 2020; Mitzen, 2006). Thus, when an actor is ontologically secure, they will know how to act, and as a result know how to be themselves. In other words, they will know their self-identity.

Narratives of Ontological Security

Both Laing (1990) and Giddens (1991) argue that maintaining ontological security is the result of both narrating and acting, entailing “narratively produced stories as much as routinised practices and the simple act of going on ‘living’ and ‘doing’” (Krickel-Choi, 2022, p. 8). In addition, Subotic (2016) posits that narratives are inherently selective and intentionally constructed. Franzosi (1998) elaborates by arguing that every narrative will emphasise certain details, while downplaying others, shaping our perceptions and imbuing them with ideological and emotional significance that influences the way in which we react and behave. This can be seen in the cases of all individuals, as autobiographies are constructed by subjectively classifying events as a triumph or defeat, pivotal moments and missed opportunities, or instances of fortune or misfortune (Hankiss, 1981, as cited in Subotic, 2016).

Similarly, groups also need a narrative: a way of constituting their identity in the form of a convincing account of their origin, their development, their similarities, and their aspirations (Subotic, 2016). Having a strong sense of your past and development is essential in providing stability. These portrayals are referred to as “ontological narratives” (Somers & Gibson, 1993, p. 30), structuring a self-identity and establishing a perspective through which collective interests emerge (Hankiss, 1981, as cited in Subotic, 2016). Therefore, as stated by Somers (1994), it is through narratives that we make sense of the world and compose our social identities.

Narratives can also have a mobilising aspect as they can be intended to promote collective values, encouraging a group identity (Subotic, 2016). This is oftentimes done by political actors, as they construct certain narratives of collective history in order to make a political point, thus using narratives as a political resource (Hart, 1992; Roediger & Wertsch, 2008). Generally, the political actors who construct ontological narratives are states, acting as a “shared ontological structure for citizens’ security” (Mitzen, 2006; Zarakol, 2017, p. 49). However, in the case of the Kurds, while they do not have a physical sovereign state, they are connected through a collective Kurdish identity (Sheyholislami, 2011).

Syria and the Kurds

In Syria, there is the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), which although it is a statelike body, it is not an independent state. Aghapouri (2023; p. 468) argues that due to the Kurds having their own language, a specific geography, history, common origin, and culture, they have almost all the characteristics needed to be called a nation. The only characteristics the Kurds lack are political recognition and sovereignty.

Moreover, in contemporary times, states are held to certain standards: in particular they need to be able to provide order, as their legitimacy depends on it (Huysmans, 1998). As

Huysmans (1998) argues, this order is “not a particular content of order but the function of ordering, of making life intelligible” (p. 242). The attempt at making life intelligible can also be seen as an “ontological narrative” (Somers & Gibson, 1993, p. 30). Therefore, if a state, or in the case of the Kurds, a stateless actor, wants to be seen as legitimate, it is expected that it provides ontological security. Therefore, the scope of this thesis is to investigate how Kurdish media assume the role of constructing narratives in order to create the aforementioned “shared ontological structure” (Zarakol, 2017, p. 49).

The US played a significant role for the Kurds in Northern Syria, not just as an ally in the fight against ISIS, but as almost a symbolic provider of Kurdish ontological security (see Appendix A). The alliance with the US gave the Kurds a sense of recognition and legitimacy, which contributed to the stabilisation of Kurdish self-narratives. Hence, when the US abruptly withdrew at times of Turkish interference, it shattered the Kurdish sense of continuity and stability, consequently deeply damaging their ontological security (see Appendix A).

Kurdish Identity and Media

Multiple scholars have extensively examined how Kurdish media constructs and navigates political shifts, contributing to the formation and evolution of Kurdish identity. For example, Jaffer Sheyholislami (2010; 2011) explores the interplay between language, identity and media among the Kurds. He investigates how satellite television and the Internet serve as platforms for Kurds to construct their identities, especially in the context of political marginalisation (Sheyholislami, 2010; Sheyholislami, 2011). The media is not just a form of communication, he argues, it is integral to the construction of a Kurdish national identity as they provide Kurds with spaces to engage in public discourse (Sheyholislami, 2011). Similarly, Aydin (2020) describes how Kurdish media in Turkey manage to shape their

identity in order to resist ‘Turkification’. Furthermore, Smets and Şengül (2016) and Aghapouri (2023) argue that the Kurdish media play a crucial role in reproducing national culture and identity, most notably in the diaspora. Aghapouri (2023) proceeds to describe how the Kurdish diaspora have used the internet as a communication medium, to compensate for the barriers between the diaspora and the homeland (p. 476).

Moreover, Çelik et al. (2017) examine how processes of othering in Turkey, particularly against Kurds, are driven by ethnic, ideological, and sectarian polarisation, which is often reinforced through limited social contact and perceived threat. Similarly Wodak (2015) explores how right-wing populist discourse constructs in-groups and out-groups, in order to generate emotional appeal and political cohesion. Together, Çelik et al. (2017) and Wodak (2015) illustrate that othering is not merely a bias but a strategic discursive practice that serves to define collective identity, legitimise exclusion, and consolidate power.

Ontological security, referring to the need for a stable sense of self and identity, is particularly relevant for the Kurds, as they have experienced constant geopolitical disruptions (Mitzen, 2006; Stein, 2022). Closely linked is the concept of (long-distance) nationalism, which captures how diaspora communities remain emotionally and politically engaged with their homeland, despite being physically separated (Anderson, 1992, as cited in Aghapouri, 2023). Detached from the everyday risks of conflict, these communities often adopt uncompromising nationalist positions, expressed through media, advocacy, and cultural production, facilitated by electronic communications (Aghapouri, 2023; Anderson, 1992, as cited in Aghapouri, 1992). Therefore, it is almost impossible “to understand national identities adequately without investigating how communication technologies serve as catalysts for their (re)construction” (Aghapouri, 2023; Sheyholislami, 2010, p. 290).

Given that the Kurdish people are a large diaspora, Kurdish media address a transnational Kurdish audience, which creates a sense of collective struggle and belonging

across recognised and unrecognised borders. The power of narratives is essential to this process, as they create a compelling story which shapes one's identity (Subotic, 2016). Narratives can be shaped by selectively framing events or portraying actors in a certain way, Kurdish media utilise this and execute it in a way which stabilises identity and mobilises collective memory (Stevens, 2023; Subotic, 2016). The Syrian Kurdish case is therefore vital for examining how identity and security are constructed not through state mechanisms, but through storytelling by media actors operating in conditions of statelessness and political uncertainty.

While the concept of ontological security has been well-established in international relations and security studies by Mitzen (2006), Wendt (1999), Zarakol (2017) among others, its application to how media creates narratives of ontological security, has been underexplored. Most of the literature on ontological security focuses on state actors, particularly how states maintain their security narratives amidst foreign policy changes, leaving the role of the media underdeveloped. Furthermore, there is substantial research on how Kurdish media construct identity, especially regarding nationalism, self-determination, and victimhood, as can be seen in the work of Sheyholislami (2011). However, implementation of the framework of ontological security has not happened yet.

Moreover, the following chapter will present the research design of this thesis, separated into three segments: Research Design, Data Collection, and Data Analysis.

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1 - Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative approach, as its main aim is to explore how Kurdish media create narratives of ontological security for the Kurds during times of instability in Syria from 2017-2021. Qualitative research allows for a deep contextual understanding of meaning-making processes, particularly the creation of stability and ontological security through storytelling. The research seeks to interpret the narrative structures, characterisations, and symbolic meanings embedded within the media's representation of key political events.

Following Yin (2009), this thesis will employ a single embedded case study design. The overarching theme is the Kurdish media landscape, while sub-units of analysis are ANHA¹ and ANF News², which are Kurdish outlets that cover events in Syria³. The articles are originally published in Kurdish, however they are also officially translated into English.. These media platforms play a central role in articulating Kurdish identity and collective memory, especially in the absence of an internationally recognised Kurdish state (Aghapouri, 2023). Therefore, these outlets, as embedded units of analysis, will be used to draw a holistic picture of the Kurdish media, reporting on events in Syria. The case of Kurdish media is not selected for being deviant or exceptional but rather for being typical of how stateless communities rely on media to stabilise their identity amid politically uncertain times (Seawright & Gerring, 2008).

The primary units of analysis in this thesis are the discourse of the two Kurdish media outlets operating within the context of the Syrian conflict, specifically ANHA and ANF News. The level of analysis is therefore organisational, as the focus is on how media

¹ Hawar News Agency (ANHA) was established in 2013, to cover events in NE Syria, the rest of Kurdistan, the Middle East, and the world. It strives to publish correct information in an era of false news (Hawar News Agency, n.d.). It is unclear who owns ANHA.

² ANF News was founded in 2005, and covers a wide range of topics in multiple languages (ANF News, 2018i). It is unclear who owns ANF News.

³ Other Kurdish news outlets include Medya Haber, Sterk TV, Ronahi TV, NRT, Rudaw, and Kurdistan24. However these outlets either do not publish articles in English, or have a focus outside of the scope of this thesis.

outlets—as political and cultural actors—construct narratives that sustain a coherent collective identity. News articles, editorials, and official statements are treated as expressions of institutional discourse, rather than personal opinion or state policy. Although each article serves as a unit of observation, the broader analytical focus lies in the collective narratives emerging from these organisations over time. This unit of analysis is particularly relevant for the study of ontological security, as it captures how non-state, stateless actors utilise media to construct stable self-narratives in the face of shifting geopolitical realities and external threats.

3.2 - Data Collection

Two Kurdish outlets were selected: ANHA and ANF News. Both are transnational media outlets, which are aligned with the dominant Kurdish actor in northern Syria, which is AANES (Center for Media, Data and Society, 2022). Another reason they were selected was due to the publication of articles officially translated to English, allowing the researcher to analyse articles intended for their traditional Kurdish audience. The positionality of the outlets is pro-Kurdish, however this is not a flaw, contrarily it is an object of analysis, as this thesis explores how they construct narratives and identity –not whether they are neutral.

The type of data collected includes online news articles, editorials, and official statements published on the websites belonging to the outlets between January 2017 and May 2023. This timespan of January 2017 until May 2023, includes several critical episodes in US-Kurdish relations, including the military cooperation against ISIS from 2017 onwards, the 2019 US withdrawal and Turkish incursion, and the continued US military presence under the Biden administration from 2020 onwards (Blanchard et al., 2016; Humud, 2022; Khidhir, 2022; Stein, 2022) (see Appendix A). The cut-off point for data collection is May 2023, one month after the final airstrike by the US-led coalition (Da Silva, 2024). Additionally, the cut-off point was selected before the commencement of the Gaza Genocide (The Office of the

High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024, p. 25), in order to ensure that the analysis remains focused on events in Syria, as the US' regional focus shifted after October 2023 (Gramer & Lemire, 2024). This timespan allows these episodes to serve as focal points for collecting media narratives and analysing how they portray actors, events, and the Kurdish political self.⁴

This thesis employs purposive sampling, allowing data to be selected that is most relevant to the research question. The selection criteria for data are: relevance to US foreign policy in Syria, Turkish military operations, direct references to Kurdish identity, security, or politics, coverage of major events involving the US and Kurdish actors, and availability in English. Articles were then selected from the websites belonging to the two news outlets, in addition to articles retrieved from Google, through keyword searches (e.g. "US", "Raqqqa", "withdrawal", "SDF", "airstrike", "Trump", "Kobani", "alliance"). When retrieved from Google, the articles were found through the "Advanced Search" function, by searching only for articles published on the two websites. In total, 63 articles were collected, however after further inspection, six articles were discarded as they were not relevant. Consequently the remaining 57 articles from ANHA and ANF News were closely analysed for narrative content (see Appendix B). Using 57 articles provided a robust dataset, striking a balance between saturation and time constraints, which allowed for meaningful coding while ensuring that the diversity of narratives is captured. This sample size supports the identification of patterns and discursive strategies across sources without being overwhelmingly large for qualitative analysis.

This dataset allows for a focused yet sufficiently broad examination of how Kurdish media construct meaning and identity in response to evolving geopolitical circumstances. The

⁴ Ethical considerations are relatively minimal given that the research uses publicly available media sources. The researcher will strive to represent the narratives respectfully and avoid misinterpretation or decontextualisation of emotionally charged content. Reflexivity will be a guiding principle throughout the process to acknowledge the researcher's own positionality and potential biases in interpreting Kurdish narratives.

sources reflect narratives created by actors with a vested interest in Kurdish autonomy, making them particularly relevant for studying ontological security and the power of narrative in stateless nation-building.

3.3 - Data analysis

This research will take an abductive approach, combining empirical observations with theoretical concepts to interpret how Kurdish media construct meaning. While grounded in the analysis of news articles, the study draws on theories of narrativity and ontological security to understand how these narratives help maintain a stable Kurdish identity amid geopolitical uncertainty. This thesis employs narrative analysis as its method of data interpretation. Narrative analysis is particularly suited for exploring how meaning is constructed through stories – how actors, events, and relationships are framed in ways that shape collective identities and perceptions of threat, support, and legitimacy (Franzosi, 1998; Stevens, 2023). “As qualitative researchers, we should not assume that the stories actors or organisations tell reflect reality, but instead present a particular version of reality, narrated in a particular way through storytelling for specific purposes” (Stevens, 2023, p. 86).

Firstly, the author familiarised himself with the data, before proceeding to generating initial codes with ATLAS.ti – identifying concepts from raw data (Braun & Clark, 2006; Cresswell, 2007, as cited in Stevens, 2023). For example, one code used was “Portrayal of fascism”, in instances where the media described Turkish actors such as President Erdogan or the Turkish military as fascist or carrying out fascist acts (see Appendix C). Subsequently, categories were developed, by finding connections between codes. From the categories, the author looked for patterns, by identifying them from within categories. Finally, this led to the development of narrative themes (Cresswell, 2007, as cited in Stevens, 2023; Stevens, 2023).

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1 - Introduction

This chapter examines how Kurdish media create narratives of ontological security for the Kurds during times of instability in Syria, and is divided into two main segments. Firstly, the manner in which the Kurdish media frame threats through emotionally charged labels will be discussed, along with how Turkey is often portrayed as fascist and assisting terrorism by helping ISIS. This is done to create an out-group, one that the Kurds could blame and see as the enemy, while simultaneously creating an in-group and painting the Kurdish fighters as heroes. This binary view serves as a stabiliser for Kurdish collective identity, reducing uncertainty and thus contributing to ontological security. Secondly, the narratives of collective suffering and resilience will be explored, as the outlets use accounts of shared trauma, martyrdom and group betrayals as a way to shape Kurdish identity and create a sense of belonging. By anchoring the Kurdish identity in resilience and perseverance, these narratives help maintain ontological security as they offer continuity and coherence in the absence of stable state structures

4.2 - The Framing of Threats: Turkish Aggression and Terrorism Narratives

Othering and Binaries

In the context of Kurdish media, the portrayal of external threats, in particular the Turkish threat, does not only play a descriptive role but a rather symbolic one. Hart (2020) highlights how metaphors in political discourse do more than describe: they also function as powerful cognitive tools that structure understanding, evoke emotional responses, and legitimise particular courses of action. These threats are articulated through expressive narratives which contribute to the reinforcement of ontological security by clearly delineating a righteous “us” and a threatening “them”. As Çelik et al. (2017) show in their study of political polarisation in Turkey, patterns of “othering” are embedded in both societal and state

discourse, often constructed along ethnic and ideological lines. Kurdish media reflect this logic from the opposite perspective, as they frame Turkey as a hostile and oppressive “other”. In doing so, they reinforce Kurdish collective identity and victimhood.

The discourse surrounding Turkish military actions frequently uses terms such as “occupation”, “aggression”, and “fascism” (ANF News, 2020a; Hawar News Agency, 2019d). These labels are not merely political, they are emotionally charged, positioning Turkey not just as a regional rival but as a “fascist regime” (Hawar News Agency, 2018m), in addition to a force of barbarism and injustice. Additionally, metaphors and contrasts are particularly prevalent in Kurdish media discourse. The conflict is often framed as a binary struggle between good and evil, civil society and barbaric attacks, resistance and occupation. This rhetorical device simplifies complex geopolitical dynamics into emotionally understandable categories, essentially oversimplifying the situation with considerable partiality. Transitivity analysis⁵ found that Turkish actions are often described using terms such as “massacres” (Hawar News Agency, 2020a), “war crimes”, or “occupation” (ANF News, 2020a), and the Turkish soldiers are often described as being “mercenaries”, “fascists”, or “terrorists”(ANF News, 2018a; Hawar News Agency, 2018a; Hawar News Agency, 2018k). Conversely, Kurdish fighters are portrayed as being “protectors”, “heroes” (ANF News, 2017b), and martyrs “who sacrifice their blood for the homeland” (Hawar News Agency, 2018d, para. 3). These metaphorical binaries not only guide, but almost force the audience to interpret the Kurdish struggle as not merely political but existential. In the Kurdish context, the evocative language choices, as described by Hart (2020) are intended to simplify the landscape for the readers, by showing that the Kurds are to be trusted while the Turks are to be feared, reinforcing Kurdish identity and bolstering the feeling of ontological security.

⁵ Transitivity analysis examines how language represents actions, actors, and events, revealing who is portrayed as doing what to whom. It helps uncover how agency, responsibility, and power are assigned, obscured, or naturalised in discourse (Stevens, 2022, p. 33)

Terrorism and Terrorism Assistance

A very prevalent narrative is that of linking Turkey to terrorism, especially to ISIS and Jabhat-al-Nusra, which further delegitimises Turkish actions. The portrayal of Turkey as a state which sponsors and supports terrorism helps represent the Kurdish resistance as both self-defensive and as a part of a broader fight against extremism and terrorism: something they do alongside the US. This aligns the Kurdish forces, such as the SDF and YPG, with international laws and norms, which further strengthens their legitimacy. Additionally it helps simplify the fighting by the Kurds, not just as a fight for territory and autonomy, but also a fight for civilisation, against barbarism.

Collective Historical Memory

The language of existential threats is intensified through the use of historical memory. Narratives referring to the Ottoman Empire, the denial of Kurdish statehood, and previous massacres are interwoven with contemporary reports of Turkish attacks on the Kurds (ANF News, 2018f). This historical layering frames Turkish aggression as part of a long-term mission of Kurdish extinction, which contributes to an ontological narrative of continuity through resistance. The Kurdish identity is not only enduring, but it endures in defiance of the same enemy across generations. Visual and structural framing within the articles also contributes to this narrative. Stories frequently open with vivid accounts of suffering, in particular of civilians or martyrs, often accompanied by graphic or personal images. In some cases the images are of victims, who had suffered serious burns as a result of the Turkish military using illegal chemical weapons (ANF News, 2019a; Hawar News Agency, 2019f). These vivid accounts were then followed by political commentary or demands for international intervention. This ordering provokes an emotional response before political reasoning, leading readers to interpret subsequent information through a lens of justified

outrage. Then repetition of terms like “martyrdom”, “glorious resistance” and “massacres against the people of Afrin” (ANF News, 2018f, Hawar News Agency, 2018j, Hawar News Agency, 2020g), function as a tool to embed these narratives in the audience's collective consciousness.

The Framing of Threats

Furthermore, framing is used in two distinct ways, as the purpose of framing the threat is not just to condemn external actors, but also to legitimise the Kurdish resistance. It was found that the boundary between factual reporting and advocacy is often blurred by the authorial voice used in the analysed data. Statements from political officials or societal groups are frequently embedded within editorialised commentary, reinforcing their legitimacy while guiding the reader's interpretation. For example, a statement by TEV-DEM, the Democratic Society Movement, warning traitors and denouncing Turkish aggression, is accompanied by evocative language as it describes the actions of the Turkish army as “the barbarism of Turkish fascist army” and the goal of the Kurdish fighters to “liberate the land of Afrin by purifying sacrifices and nobility” (Hawar News Agency, 2018a, para. 1&3). Such framing elevates ordinary political statements into narrative tools that solidify identity and purpose. Narratives are not just stories; they are epistemological frameworks through which individuals and communities make sense of their social reality (Somers and Gibson, 1993), and portraying the Kurdish people as defenders of justice, civilisation, and democracy helps create a sense of stability and ontological security in an otherwise unstable regional context.

This discursive approach aligns with Wodak’s (2015) research on right-wing populist discourse, where emotional mobilisation and the construction of ‘in-groups’ and ‘out-groups’ serve to provide clarity and create more cohesion amid political uncertainty. While the context is different, the application is similar, as Kurdish media use evocative language to

produce a clear moral narrative and reaffirm their collective identity in the face of shifting political conditions. Thus, the use of fear, outrage and pride in such narratives helps readers feel ontologically secure in who they are, by reinforcing collective bonds and shared threats.

In summary, the narrative construction of external threats in Kurdish media, in particular through the portrayal of Turkish aggression and terrorism, is not just simply reactive emotional reporting. It is a deliberate strategy to tell a story which consolidates Kurdish identity, strengthening cohesion, and contributes to a sense of ontological security in the face of uncertainty

4.3 - Trauma, Historical Embedding and Democratic Legitimacy

The Role of Narratives

In stateless contexts, national identity must be narrated, as it cannot be institutionalised, and while AANES offers some structures of governance, identity construction continues to rely heavily on discourse in the media. For the Kurds, identity construction is rooted in the telling and retelling of collective struggle, resilience, and grief. Kurdish media play a central role in this process, using emotionally charged narratives to articulate what it means to be Kurdish. This is not only expressed in terms of ethnicity, but also through shared moral values, political commitment, and historical endurance. These narratives do more than reflect events; they construct a communal sense of self that fosters ontological security in the absence of statehood.

Kurdish media work to consolidate identity through repetition, constructing a Kurdish self around a coherent narrative of suffering, moral resistance, and collective survival. These narratives are not simply journalistic, but rather they are existential tools that help the community make sense of the uncertainty by providing predictability and emotional reassurance. Hence, when Kurds are portrayed as perpetual victims and moral actors, it can

reaffirm a stable identity that can endure external shocks, such as shifting alliances or sudden acts of betrayal (ANF News, 2018f; Hawar News Agency, 2018k). Mitzen's (2006) definition of ontological security relies on the maintenance of consistent self-narratives, and metaphors and contrasts in Kurdish media help accomplish precisely that. They offer a cognitive map that makes the region's volatile and unpredictable dynamics easier to understand. In turn, it reinforces a shared sense of who the Kurds are, what they stand for, and how they relate to the broader international arena, which does not just provide information, but ontological reassurance.

Trauma, Suffering and Resilience

Throughout the dataset, Kurdish media repeatedly invoke stories of martyrdom, civilian suffering, and betrayals (ANF News, 2017b; ANF News, 2019a; Hawar News Agency, 2018j). These are not presented as isolated grievances but are framed as foundational elements of Kurdish identity. In essence, narratives of collective suffering are leveraged to gain political legitimacy and influence. Martyrs are referred to as embodiments of “heroism”, and the surviving forces are “fighting to the last drop of our blood to be worthy of [the martyred]” (ANF News, 2018f, paras. 9&11). This language transforms trauma into a unifying force in the ontologically secure Kurdish national narrative.

This aligns with Subotić's (2016) analysis of Serbia's Kosovo policy, where she argues that historical trauma is not simply remembered but actively mobilised in political discourse to reinforce moral legitimacy and justify contemporary political aims. Although her study focuses on a state actor, similar strategies are visible in stateless groups like the Kurds, whose media use their collective suffering to reaffirm the Kurdish identity and cultivate internal solidarity.

This framing also reflects what Edkins (2003) describes as the politicisation of memory, where communities shape public narratives of trauma to restore meaning in the aftermath of violence. In Kurdish media, the grief becomes productive, as it is used to capitalise on the dead by lifting them to a sacred level, and in doing so it mobilises the audience. This allows the Kurdish identity to be grounded in endurance rather than in defeat.

Alongside collective suffering, resilience emerges as a central narrative. Language imbued with pride and loyalty is extremely prevalent, as phrases such as “This is the glorious resistance of the people” (ANF News, 2018f, para. 11) are frequently found. They are not just passionate slogans, but rather they are used to ensure that the story of Kurdish identity remains coherent in the face of uncertainty and betrayal, allowing for a strengthened sense of ontological security.

Historical Embedding

The media’s linguistic strategies are not only reactive but also generative. Rather than merely responding to regional events and alliances, they actively construct a sense of Kurdish agency, historical continuity, and legitimacy. As Krolkowski (2018) notes, official discourses in chaotic times serve as a stabiliser, producing continuity which helps communities navigate crises and reconstruct their sense of self and community. In doing so, Kurdish media do more than relay events, as they articulate coherently framed worldviews spanning not only over years, but over multiple generations. These narratives draw upon past resistance efforts to mobilise the audience, framing it as part of a broader trajectory aimed at securing future aspirations, as can be seen in ANF News (2018f): “It is not right to see the Turkish state as a force that is newly attempting an invasion, they have a history of this” (para. 7). The media often remember historic locations, such as Kobani and Afrin, where important battles took place and fighters were martyred (ANF News, 2017b; ANF News 2018b; ANF News, 2018f;

ANF News, 2019b). The locations are remembered not just as battlegrounds, but as symbolic places of perseverance, which are woven into a larger narrative of the Kurdish resistance.

This narrative coherence is crucial for maintaining ontological security in a region which is characterised by instability. When external powers withdraw support or alliances change, such as the withdrawal of the United States during the fight against ISIS (Stein, 2022), it is reported upon but not in an overly emotional manner – contrary to the initial hypothesis. The Kurdish outlets maintain a diplomatic tone, and do not directly blame them for Kurdish casualties as a result of their withdrawal, as seen in an article by Hawar News Agency (2018j), which stated: “The American decision was refused with great discontent and condemnation by the general Kurdish people” (para. 1). The general narrative is that the US is still seen as an actor that can help the Kurds, as they are suffering under the Turkish attacks. This includes appeals to the US to recognise what Turkey is doing, alongside calls for help: in other words “America must see what Turkey has done” (Hawar News Agency, 2018j, para. 7). This ties in with Chapter 4.2, as Turkey is framed as the true aggressor, and the actor that is to blame for Kurdish suffering. However, in general, these events are merely seen as setbacks, despite the casualties, as Kurdish media contextualise these setbacks within a broader historical trajectory of struggle and resilience. Putting these difficulties into perspective illustrates that they are no existential threats –as the Kurdish people have already persevered through similar situations – but rather a small hindrance. In summary, the Kurdish identity is not rooted in sovereignty or formal alliances, however it is rooted in a continuous narrative of resistance which affirms independence, endurance, resilience and ontological security.

Democratic Legitimacy

Kurdish identity is not defined solely in opposition to violence; it is also constructed through shared values. Media narratives frequently emphasise democracy, gender equality, anti-fascism, and pluralism (Hawar News Agency, 2018k; Hawar News Agency, 2019n). These are not only political goals but identity markers. The SDF, the YPG, the YPJ, and AANES are cast not just as defenders of Kurdish lands, but as representatives of a morally righteous political project.

This strategy aligns with Subotić's (2016) analysis of how actors maintain ontological security by preserving coherent self-narratives during times of crisis. She argues that "Narratives are important for state ontological security seeking because they provide autobiographical justification and continuity with the "good past." (Subotic, 2016, p. 614). In essence, if states, or in this case a stateless group, do not have a positive view of themselves, it can lead to a rupture in their ontological security (Steele, 2007). In Kurdish media, contrast is consistently drawn between Kurdish governance, which is framed as inclusive and the Turkish state, often described as colonial or fascist (Hawar News Agency, 2018k). The frequent inclusion of Yazidis, Syriacs, Assyrians, Armenians, and Arabs in these narratives reinforces the idea of a community with morals which transcends ethnic boundaries (ANF News, 2017a; Hawar News Agency, 2019h; Hawar News Agency, 2019n).

This inclusivity in the discourse reinforces the Kurdish identity by highlighting a shared sacrifice, rather than just nationalism. Krolikowski (2018) notes that these narrative 'anchors' help communities manage crises by offering consistent reference points. By linking identity to universal values, Kurdish media not only promote internal cohesion but also seek legitimacy on the international stage, which ties into what Subotic (2016) argues "States need to feel good about themselves and about their past action in order to continue to function in international society" (p. 6).

In summary, Kurdish media construct identity through a layered narrative of collective suffering, symbolic resilience, and moral legitimacy. These stories provide ontological security by transforming loss into unity, instability into continuity, and statelessness into purpose. The Kurdish identity that emerges from these narratives is not passive but resistant and not defeated but enduring. In the absence of recognised institutional statehood, it is through emotional, political, and historical narratives that Kurdish identity is secured and reaffirmed.

4.4 - Conclusion

This chapter has examined how Kurdish media create narratives of ontological security for the Kurds during times of instability in Syria. Firstly, the framing of threats plays a key role in maintaining collective identity. Turkish military operations and its alleged support for terrorists such as ISIS are portrayed not only as immediate threats, but as part of a continuous pattern of aggression against the Kurdish people. This construction of a threatening "other" reinforces internal unity and positions Kurdish actors as the heroic and morally superior defenders of their people. This is aided by the use of emotionally charged language which shapes interpretation and establishes a consistent moral framework, morally justifying the Kurdish struggle.

Secondly, Kurdish identity is built through narratives of nationalism, resilience, and democratic legitimacy. Accounts of martyrdom, betrayal, and historical trauma are used to create a sense of common resilience and political justification, and incidents such as the US withdrawal are merely seen as setbacks and as almost as insignificant when Kurdish history is considered. Kurdish actors are also portrayed as inclusive and democratic, strengthening their internal legitimacy and international appeal. Thus, in the absence of a recognised sovereign state, these media narratives become key mechanisms for sustaining identity and political purpose.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine *how Kurdish media create narratives of ontological security for the Kurds during times of instability in Syria?* Through qualitative analysis of 57 articles from Kurdish outlets, it demonstrated that Kurdish media serve not only as information sources but as key actors in shaping a stable collective identity. The findings demonstrate that Kurdish media use narrative strategies to offer continuity and coherence amid political uncertainty, constructing identity grounded in resistance and suffering. Rather than simply reacting to events such as the US withdrawal, Kurdish media actively place the events within a longer historical trajectory of betrayal and resilience, thus reinforcing ontological security and political identity.

The analysis resulted in two core findings. Firstly, the way the Kurdish media frame threats is crucial. The actions of the Turkish military are often portrayed not just as events in isolation, but as a part of a longer history of existential threats. Kurdish media use evocative language and narrative structure to create both emotional impact and clarity, which is often done by linking Turkey to terrorism and accusing it of fascism and genocidal intent. This framing reinforces a strong sense of internal solidarity and collectivity by clearly identifying an external enemy and positioning Kurdish fighters as heroic defenders rather than aggressors.

Secondly, Kurdish identity is centred around narratives of collective trauma, resilience and democratic legitimacy. Stories of heroism, martyrdom, betrayal and oppression are used to transform trauma into a unifying force. Suffering is presented as a defeat but a source of unity and legitimacy rooting the Kurdish identity in a continuous narrative of resistance, affirming resilience and endurance. Additionally, values such as democracy, equality and inclusivity are emphasised and act as a stabilising force, anchoring the Kurdish struggle in legitimacy and righteousness.

Contrary to the initial hypothesis that Kurdish media would be grateful for the US alliance and that they would respond with alarm to its withdrawal, the findings show a more nuanced narrative strategy. While past cooperation is occasionally acknowledged, the general framing positions the US withdrawal as yet another chapter in a broader history of abandonment, reinforcing existing narratives of resilience and self-reliance, underpinning Kurdish ontological security, rather than destabilising it.

These findings contribute to broader research on ontological security, which has traditionally focused on states, as seen in Mitzen (2006), Subotić (2016) and Zarakol (2017). This study extends that framework of ontological security by applying it to a stateless context, showing how media can act as a stabilising institution in the absence of formal sovereignty. It supports Krolkowski's (2018) argument that resilience narratives help stateless communities maintain coherence in the face of disruption, and aligns with Edkins (2003) in demonstrating how politicised memory enables identity continuity through trauma. The findings also add to Kurdish media studies by building on Sheyholislami (2010), whose work emphasises the role of language and media in articulating a collective sense of Kurdishness, as it supports his findings by showing how similar discursive strategies are deployed during periods of geopolitical instability to reinforce ontological security.

This research has found that non-state actors, such as the Kurds, use media not only to react to instability but to construct narratives that manage fear, assert political legitimacy, and reinforce collective identity. It demonstrates that ontological security is not just confined to sovereign states but can be actively produced through narrative techniques, collective memory, and symbolic representation. Narratives serve as a political tool, not only to document struggle but also to shape how a group understands itself and its role in the world. While this study focuses on Kurdish media in Syria, similar dynamics might be present among Kurdish communities in Iraq, Turkey, and the global diaspora, where media could play an essential role in responding to marginalisation and adapting to shifting political

conditions. Ontological security can exist without sovereignty, as long as mechanisms such as media are in place to generate meaning, continuity, and a coherent sense of identity in the face of uncertainty. This highlights how, for stateless groups, narrative construction is not just a form of expression but a means of political and emotional survival in unstable environments.

A key strength of this research is that it focuses on a strategically significant, underexplored case, which provides a new insight into the intersection of media, identity, and security, through a robust and detailed analysis of 57 articles. It also makes a theoretical contribution by applying ontological security to stateless actors, demonstrating that identity stabilisation through narrative is possible even in the absence of formal institutions.

However, this thesis also has a few limitations. Firstly, the author does not speak Arabic, Sorani or Kurmanji. Therefore, all data was retrieved in officially translated versions, which was sufficient, however the research would benefit from analysing the data in its original language in order to capture all the nuances. Additionally, the language restriction limited the available data, as Kurdish outlets often do not translate their articles into English. This resulted in the timeframe of the data being from 2017 onwards, as there were no articles available in English from ANHA or ANF from before 2017.

Further research could also apply a narrative analysis to Kurdish media reporting on current events. 2024 and 2025 have been turbulent, therefore applying the narrative analysis to Kurdish media and its portrayal of the fall of the Al-Assad government or the disbandment of the PKK would be a significant addition to existing research on the Kurds and ontological security. Similarly, due to the timeframe of the research falling outside the apex of ISIS' success in 2014 and 2015 and the establishment of the caliphate in Syria and Iraq (Stein, 2022), further research could explore the portrayal of these events in Kurdish media. Finally, comparative research with other stateless groups could test the broader applicability of these findings, in particular how identity and security are produced in stateless contexts.

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Appendix A - Timeline of US intervention in Syria 2014-2021

In June of 2014, ISIS captured the Iraqi city of Mosul, prompting increased US involvement, leading the US to launch *Operation Inherent Resolve*, which was a coordinated military campaign against ISIS, first in Iraq and later in Syria (Blanchard et al., 2016; Stein, 2022). This included targeted attacks on ISIS strongholds and military support for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), primarily consisting of a Kurdish militia - the People's Protection Units (YPG) (Blanchard et al., 2016; Stein, 2022).

By 2015, the US officially helped form the SDF, by bringing together Kurdish, Arab and other ethnic factions to coordinate anti-ISIS efforts. At the time, the US found itself in a precarious situation, having to balance their relations with the Kurds and their relations with Turkey (Gunter, 2015). However, despite Ankara's objection, the US increased military support to Kurdish militias – groups Turkey sees as being terrorist organisations (Gunter, 2015; Stein, 2022). By December, the US had boots on the ground in Syria, further committing to fighting ISIS while attempting to balance its relationship with Turkey (Blanchard et al., 2016; Stein, 2022).

In 2016, the US intensified its support by deploying more troops, as well as providing more weapons and intelligence to Kurdish fighters (Blanchard et al., 2016; Stein, 2022). Subsequently, in March with US backing, the SDF launched attacks on ISIS strongholds. Following the successful liberation of Manbij by the SDF, tensions rose with Turkey, leading them to launch *Operation Euphrates Shield* to counter Kurdish territorial expansion on their southern border (Blanchard et al., 2016; Gurcan, 2019; Stein, 2022).

In 2017, the SDF together with US support, liberated Raqqa, which was a symbolic victory as it was ISIS' self-declared capital in Syria (Khidhir, 2022; Stein, 2022). This marked a turning point in the conflict, with ISIS losing major strongholds (Stein, 2022).

By 2018, Turkey launched *Operation Olive Branch*, a campaign targeting the US-backed Kurdish forces in Afrin, Syria, causing a difficult situation for the US (Gurcan, 2019). In December, Trump announced the victory over ISIS and the subsequent withdrawal of US forces from Syria, before partially reversing the order, as a small force remained in Syria to assist Kurdish allies (Khidhir, 2022; Stein, 2022).

Eventually, in 2019, Trump withdrew US forces from the north of Syria, which allowed Turkey to launch *Operation Peace Spring* – an attack on Kurdish controlled areas (Khidhir, 2022; Stein, 2022). Following the attack, the US redeployed some forces to secure oil fields and continue operations against ISIS (Stein, 2022). In light of regional tensions, the Biden administration continued a limited military presence in Syria supporting the SDF in counterterrorism efforts (Humud, 2021).

Appendix B - Overview of analysed articles

Article Reference	Title	Date of Publication	Newspaper
ANF News 1	Arab fighters in SDF: Peoples on these lands are brothers	14 April 2017	ANF News
ANF News 2	10 YPG fighters martyred whilst protecting civilians	07 May 2017	ANF News
ANF News 3	YPG commander Hemo: We don't accept Turkey's presence in any form	30 June 2017	ANF News
ANF News 4	SDF commander: 70 percent of Raqqa cleared of ISIS	11 September 2017	ANF News
ANF News 5	YPJ fighters: We will liberate the women of Deir ez-Zor too	12 September 2017	ANF News
ANF News 6	Aerial footage from al-Omar oil field held by SDF	31 October 2017	ANF News
ANF News 7	YPG: We will resist for Afrin with spirit of self-sacrifice	20 January 2018	ANF News
ANF News 8	YPJ spokeswoman: Like in Kobani and Raqqa, we will win in Afrin	20 January 2018	ANF News
ANF News 9	YPG publishes identities of Turkish soldiers killed in Afrin	24 January 2018	ANF News
ANF News 10	International fighters on the way to Afrin	25 January 2018	ANF News
ANF News 11	War crimes: 200 houses destroyed in a neighborhood of Jindires	10 February 2018	ANF News
ANF News 12	YPJ commander Kobane: We salute the resistance of Afrin's people	25 February 2018	ANF News
ANF News 13	Airstrikes and artillery shelling pummel besieged Afrin	15 March 2018	ANF News
ANF News 14	Invaders pillage Afrin's history	09 July 2018	ANF News
ANF News 15	YPG: 74 invaders killed in Afrin in September	02 October 2018	ANF News
ANF News 16	Syriac officials: Our people have alternatives	25 December 2018	ANF News

ANF News 17	Footage proves Turkish use of chemical weapons in northern Syria	18 October 2019	ANF News
ANF News 18	Massive ceremony for 14 martyrs in Derik	09 November 2019	ANF News
ANF News 19	Occupation forces attack villages in Afrin countryside	14 May 2020	ANF News
ANF News 20	People in Rojava take to the streets against the Turkish attacks	16 June 2020	ANF News
ANF News 21	People in Kobane: We will defend our lands together	24 October 2021	ANF News
Hawar News Agency 1	TEV-DEM warns “traitors” Afrin dust, its oil will not celebrate their arrival	22 March 2018	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 2	Ilham Ahmed: international promises about Afrin	01 May 2018	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 3	SDF Seized to weapons, ammunitions during al-Jazeera Tempest	14 May 2018	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 4	YPG General Command congratulated Syrian people on July 19th Revolution	18 July 2018	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 5	Kobanî ends IS’ extension , Turkish ambitions	15 September 2018	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 6	Green Party: Turkish aggression supports terrorist organizations	31 October 2018	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 7	Inter-Coalition, SDF running joint patrols in Kobani, Girê Spî	02 November 2018	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 8	US report: Turkey’s invasion of Afrin hampered war against IS, attacks on North Syria strengthen its power	07 November 2018	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 9	Rojava youths described US decision as new plot on Kurdish people	10 November 2018	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 10	US must see what has done against minorities by Turkey, before issuing decision	16 November 2018	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 11	International fighters: We will defend our revolution against fascism	18 December 2018	Hawar News Agency

Hawar News Agency 12	Mohammed Nour Eldin: Turkey's policies put Syria in danger	21 December 2018	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 13	Erdogan revives his racial ambition, IS return threaten world peace	26 December 2018	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 14	SDF transformed the military balance , fulfilled people's dream	03 January 2019	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 15	SDF are fulcrum, turned the scales -2	04 January 2019	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 16	Mazloun Abdi elaborates on challenges SDF face after Daesh elimination	22 June 2019	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 17	Erdogan's goal is to empty Rojava from Kurds	27 September 2019	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 18	The Times: Evidence of white phosphorus use is increasing against Turkey	21 October 2019	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 19	NEWSWEEK reveals through images evidence Turkey's use of internationally prohibited weapons in N, E Syria	22 October 2019	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 20	Turkish vehicle destroyed, mercenaries fled Afdeko village	26 October 2019	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 21	Syriac, Armenian fighters: Just as we defeated ISIS, we will counter Turkish attacks	07 November 2019	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 22	Coalition forces pull out large part of its troops from Sarrin base	13 November 2019	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 23	YPG is the most human power in its project and achievements	05 December 2019	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 24	Idlib displaced: Turkey sold Idlib people to Syrian regime	07 February 2020	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 25	ISIS fight desperately to lift siege on Turkish occupation checkpoints	12 February 2020	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 26	Regime tries to advance in Aleppo countryside, Turkish occupation enters new convoy	15 February 2020	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 27	Two U.S. soldiers, a British killed in missile attack on al-Taji camp	11 March 2020	Hawar News Agency

Hawar News Agency 28	International coalition praises SDF's sacrifices	23 March 2020	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 29	Trump's advisor: Our alliance with SDF is strategic; our aim in Syria is to weaken Russia, Iran	17 May 2020	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 30	Turkish occupation shelling kills a Kurdish youth in Dohuk countryside	19 June 2020	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 31	Turkish Intelligence MIT is active through Syrian National Army	09 August 2020	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 32	People of Kobane demonstrate against Turkish occupation, conspiracy against Ocalan	09 October 2020	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 33	<i>Joint Russian -Turkish patrol eastern Kobani</i>	26 November 2020	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 34	US sanctions on Turkey welcomed	15 December 2020	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 35	Biden appoints McGurk as envoy to Middle East, North Africa	08 January 2021	Hawar News Agency
Hawar News Agency 36	Ilham Ahmed: Pro-government forces must leave Qamishlo entirely, countries must take back their citizens	07 May 2021	Hawar News Agency

Appendix C - Codebook

Code Label	Code Group	Explanation	Code application
Alliance Betrayal	Threat Framing and Conflict	Refers to perceived abandonment by international allies such as the US or the International Alliance.	Applied when Kurdish media expressed disappointment, betrayal, or broken trust by foreign actors.
Anti-Facism	Identity, Nationalism, and Collective Emotion	Frames Kurdish struggle as part of a broader moral fight against fascism and authoritarianism.	Used in statements describing Turkey or enemies as "fascist" and Kurdish resistance as anti-fascist.
Author's intent	Discursive Strategies	Indicates rhetorical or persuasive objectives behind an article or statement.	Applied where the author clearly steers reader interpretation or moral judgment through tone or structure.
Blame Turkey	Threat Framing and Conflict	Explicit assignment of blame to Turkey for violence, instability, or betrayal.	Used when Turkey was directly accused of aggression, terrorism support, or undermining Kurdish efforts.
Collective identity/Collective suffering	Identity, Nationalism, and Collective Emotion	Highlights shared Kurdish experiences of trauma, oppression, and perseverance.	Used in articles referring to martyrdom, displacement, or generational struggle as unifying elements.
Conflict	Threat Framing and Conflict	Mentions or analysis of active armed conflict involving Kurdish forces.	Applied to descriptions of battlefield events, escalations, or clashes with Turkish or proxy forces.
Empowerment	Identity, Nationalism, and Collective Emotion	Emphasises Kurdish agency, autonomy, or political/military strength.	Used when Kurdish actors are portrayed as leaders, organisers, or moral figures advancing their own cause.
Evocative language	Discursive Strategies	Use of emotionally charged or symbolic language to shape perception.	Applied to dramatic or poetic language meant to stir emotion or allegiance.

Heroism	Discursive Strategies	Frames individuals (especially fighters or martyrs) as heroic or self-sacrificing.	Used in glorifying descriptions of Kurdish fighters, especially those killed in action or defying odds, as well as when individuals are killed by the enemy.
Injustice/outrage	Identity, Nationalism, and Collective Emotion	Expressions of moral or emotional indignation over violence, betrayal, suffering or illegal acts.	Applied when articles used terms like “crime,” “shameful,” or “inhuman” to provoke reader sympathy or anger.
Kurdish identity/struggle	Identity, Nationalism, and Collective Emotion	Portrayal of what it means to be Kurdish and the ongoing fight for recognition.	Used in references to cultural survival, national rights, or long-standing political goals of the Kurdish people.
Kurdish unity	Identity, Nationalism, and Collective Emotion	Emphasis on internal cohesion among Kurds across regions or factions.	Applied when calls for solidarity were made, or multiple Kurdish groups were shown cooperating.
(Lack of) Comparison/contrast	Discursive Strategies	Highlights absence or presence of direct comparisons between Kurdish actors and others.	Used when articles either contrasted Kurdish values with those of adversaries or failed to provide balanced perspectives.
Legitimisation	Discursive Strategies	Strategies used to portray Kurdish authorities or armed groups as rightful and legitimate leaders.	Used in discussions of the SDF, AANES, or YPG as responsible, democratic, or internationally worthy actors.
Metaphors and contrast	Discursive Strategies	Use of metaphors and contrasting binaries to frame narratives.	Applied when Kurds were portrayed as light vs. darkness, peace vs. war, good vs. evil.
Militancy	Threat Framing and Conflict	Mentions of armed struggle, military organisation, or formation of armed groups.	Used when articles described military operations or ideologically charged action by Kurdish forces.
Narrative techniques	Discursive Strategies	Structural or stylistic tools used to frame events as part of a broader story.	Applied when stories followed classic narrative arcs, for example suffering leads to resistance which leads to hope.

Nationalism	Identity, Nationalism, and Collective Emotion	Expressions of national pride, identity, or aspiration for sovereignty.	Used when articles referenced the Kurdish nation, homeland, or calls for self-rule.
Political tension	Threat Framing and Conflict	Coverage of escalating rhetoric, instability, or intergovernmental strain.	Applied to diplomatic disputes, threats, or contested alliances.
Portrayal of fascism	Discursive Strategies	Depiction of enemies, especially Turkey, using fascist imagery or terminology.	Used when Kurdish media likened Turkish actions to fascism, authoritarianism or genocide.
Resilience	Identity, Nationalism, and Collective Emotion	Representations of Kurdish endurance, persistence, and moral strength.	Applied when the media highlighted surviving betrayal, rebuilding, or continued resistance despite setbacks.
Resistance	Identity, Nationalism, and Collective Emotion	Active opposition to oppression or foreign aggression.	Used in descriptions of protests, defence against invasion, or ideological perseverance.
Strong emphasis	Discursive Strategies	Statements made with reinforced or exaggerated intensity for rhetorical effect.	Applied to headlines or quotes using repetition, hyperbole, or definitive phrasing to underscore a message.
Struggle	Identity, Nationalism, and Collective Emotion	General reference to hardship in Kurdish history or political condition.	Used broadly in framing the Kurdish cause as ongoing and existential.
Terrorism/terrorist assistance	Threat Framing and Conflict	Allegations that Turkey supports, funds, and/or enables extremist groups such as ISIS or HTS.	Applied in articles accusing Turkey of collaborating with, funding, or enabling terrorist groups such as ISIS, HTS or Jabhat al-Nusra.
Threat identification	Threat Framing and Conflict	Naming or describing actors/events as threats to Kurdish existence or autonomy.	Used when specific dangers were outlined such as airstrikes or invasions.

Turkish aggression	Threat Framing and Conflict	Specific coverage of Turkish military operations or hostile rhetoric.	Applied to airstrikes, ground invasions, or any miscellaneous threats targeting Kurdish regions or Kurdish actors.
Universal values	Identity, Nationalism, and Collective Emotion	References to democracy, human rights, gender equality, and international law.	Used to align Kurdish political aims with international norms and justify legitimacy.